Alternative Education Programs, Models, and Standards

The Background:

T.C.A. §49-6-3404 established the Governor's Advisory Council for Alternative Education.   The Advisory Council is a multi-discipline committee comprised of 10 members including the following: parents of children attending an alternative school or of children who have attended an alternative school, teachers, principals, members of local boards of education, community representatives, and a member of the Tennessee Alternative Educators Association. Under T.C.A. *§49-6-3404*, the Advisory Council is charged to do the following:

- Consider any issue, problem or matter related to alternative education presented to it by the Governor, the Commissioner, or the State Board of Education, and give advice thereon.
- Study proposed plans for alternative education programs or curricula to determine if the plans or curricula should be adopted.
- Study alternative education programs or curricula implemented in Tennessee school systems to determine the effectiveness of the programs or curricula, and alternative education programs or curricula implemented in other states to determine if the programs or curricula should be adopted in Tennessee schools.
- Consider rules of governance of alternative schools and make recommendations concerning rules of governance.
- Make an annual report to the Governor, the education committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education on the state of alternative education in Tennessee. The report shall be submitted prior to February 1 each year.

Consistent with *T.C.A. §49-6-3404,* the Governor's Advisory Council for Alternative Education revisited Alternative School Program Standards that were adopted in 2000 by the State Board of Education. The council met on September 21, 2007, November 9, 2007, and February 8, 2008. During those meetings the Council revised the existing program model and standards and developed an updated model comprised of new standards and benchmarks. The program model and standards reflect current research and best practices in the field of alternative education as well as other innovative practices being employed by other states.

Several entities were consulted during the development of the new model and standards, including: alternative educators, Department of Children Services, Department of Education including Division of Special Education, the State Board of Education, the National Alternative Education Association, the Tennessee Alternative Educators Association, directors of schools, school counselors, mental health

professionals, the higher education community, parents, principals, and students. These groups were utilized in conducting a metaevaluation of the proposed program model and standards.

The Governor's Advisory Council for Alternative Education recommends that the State Board of Education adopt the preceding program model that includes standards and the indicators that inform them. The model addresses the following broad categories/areas: school/program mission and environment, governance, transitional planning, support services, parent/community engagement, staffing and professional development, individualized learner plans, life skills, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, and monitoring and program assessment. The new program model and standards will replace the previously adopted (2000) Alternative School Program Standards upon approval from the State Board.

The Master Plan Connection:

The Alternative Education Program Model and Standards presented herewith support the Board's Master Plan by providing access to best practices surrounding the delivery of curriculum and instruction that is most appropriate for students in an alternative learning environment. They further support quality teaching by advancing teacher/administrator understanding of how to address the distinct learning needs of students in an alternative education setting. Furthermore, the proposed model and standards provide a framework under which school or program leadership can operate when providing these types of education services.

The Recommendation:

The Governor's Advisory Council for Alternative Education recommends adoption of the model and standards on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

Alternative Education Program Model/Standards

Standard 1.0: Mission
An exemplary alternative education program operates with a clearly stated mission, a formal set of standards, and a plan for program improvement.

1.1	The mission describes the reason for the program and the students to be served.
1.2	The mission has a unifying theme that invokes high levels of staff support.
1.3	Student success is central to the mission.
1.4	The program's goals and objectives provide a focus for program improvement.
1.5	The mission, goals, and expected outcomes are documented, published, and clearly visible to staff, students, and parents.
1.6	The program operates under a policies and procedures manual that is approved by the local board of education.

Standard 2.0: Program Environment
An exemplary alternative education program provides a safe, positive, and nurturing environment which is conducive to learning.

2.1	The program provides a written code of conduct which is clearly understood, accepted, and consistently applied to all students (e.g. level system or similar behavior support mechanisms).
2.2	The program is housed in a safe, well-maintained, and accessible physical environment that supports optimal student learning.
2.3	The program has a detailed safety plan that has been distributed and practiced to ensure the security and good health of students and staff.
2.4	The program demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to academic, cultural, social, behavioral, and developmental needs of students, parents, and the community.
2.5	There is an atmosphere of mutual respect among program staff, students, parents, and the community.
2.6	Staff communicates high expectations for students' academic performance and overall behavior.
2.7	Students have a role in shaping the learning environment.
2.8	There is a low student to teacher ratio (1:12) with a teaching assistant for each certified staff person and classes not exceeding 12 students.

Standard 3.0: Governance
An exemplary alternative education program operates under an Advisory Board comprised of staff, parents, students and community representatives who provide leadership and support in developing and communicating the program's mission, standards, and planning for continuous improvement.

3.1	The program has an Advisory Board consisting of faculty members, parents, students, community representatives, and other district personnel who meet on a regular basis during the school year.

3.2	The Advisory Board makes recommendations to the program administrator on its mission, written policies, and procedures to ensure continuous improvement.
3.3	The program administrator empowers the Advisory Board to help accomplish the shared vision and goals of the program.
3.4	The Advisory Board is directly involved in program activities and rallies community support.
3.5	Board members have ownership in the overall success of the program.

Standard 4.0: Transitional Planning

An exemplary alternative education program implements a transitional plan for students entering and exiting the program which ensures the likelihood of student success.

4.1	The program has a Screening Committee to ensure that the alternative placement is most appropriate for the student's specific educational, behavioral, and social needs (individual student, individual placement decision).
4.2	The program provides a written transitional plan from pre-entry through post-exit for every student in attendance which includes the following: an orientation which consists of rapport building, assessment of the student, IEP review, short and long-term goal setting, development of an individualized learner plan, and other mechanisms designed to orient the student to the alternative education setting.
4.3	Transitional plans afford students the opportunity to maintain and accelerate their current progress toward graduation.
4.4	A Student Support Team is established that consists of educators from the school of origin, educators from the alternative education program, the student, and parent(s) who are directly involved in all aspects of the transitional process including drafting, implementing, monitoring, and periodically modifying the transitional plan.
4.5	The Student Support Team assesses and matches needs to services to ensure the following: early interventions are developed to minimize the number and length of alternative education placements, social readiness is assessed before returning to the school of origin, continuance of required services are provided to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, and limited English proficiency and/or significant skill deficiencies are addressed.
4.6	Information sharing (*availability of pertinent records**) takes place between the home school, and/or Department of Children Services, and/or juvenile correctional center, and/or local juvenile treatment centers.
4.7	When appropriate, students in alternative education programs are provided with various opportunities to develop and maintain supportive links to the school of origin.
4.8	Prior to a student's entrance and exit from an alternative education program, transitional services are coordinated with the home school, alternative education program, the student, and parents to ensure a successful return.
4.9	Transition services are routinely evaluated to determine the program's effectiveness in promoting the return and continued success of students in the traditional school program (including follow-up visits with past participants).

Copies of the school enrollment letter, birth certificate, social security card, immunization records, report cards, transcripts, TCAP/ Gateway scores, attendance records, discipline records, special education file and IEP (if applicable), current health treatments and medications needed during school hours are given to the alternative education program

Standard 5.0: Support Services
An exemplary alternative education program embodies a sound set of support mechanisms that contribute to optimal student development.

5.1	The program provides a comprehensive student assistance program that includes referrals to community agencies as needed.
5.2	Relationships are established to support the physical and mental health needs of the students enrolled.
5.3	The program provides guidance, tutoring, and counseling to promote student performance.
5.4	The program offers a broad range of weekly individual and/or group counseling sessions.
5.5	The program utilizes researched based dropout prevention strategies and character building programs (e.g. conflict resolution, mentoring programs, etc.).
5.6	The program provides the appropriate services to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and/or significant skill deficiencies.

Standard 6.0: Parent/ Community Engagement
An exemplary alternative education program strives to establish collaborative partnerships with the community and parents to nourish a system of shared responsibility for enrolled students.

6.1	Administration ensures that effective communication and interaction take place between parents and school personnel including being continually notified of their child's progress.
6.2	The program affords opportunities for parents to be included and supported in the development of their children.
6.3	Parents are involved in drafting, developing and implementing the student's individualized learner plan.
6.4	Parents receive personal contacts and/or training regarding techniques and strategies that help their child achieve maximum learning and personal success.
6.5	Parents help evaluate the effectiveness of the program and provide feedback and suggestions to improve the quality of services.
6.6	School leadership involves the community through partnerships.
6.7	Partnerships are designed to support and enrich the school's learning environment by including the community as an educational resource (e.g. providing a community sponsored mentor program and/or service learning program).

6.8	Partnerships exist with community service organizations, public agencies, cultural groups, industry, and business.
6.9	There is a strong collaboration with law enforcement, the juvenile justice system, juvenile treatment centers and other youth oriented organizations.
6.10	There is a collaborative process based on open communication and shared responsibility which links the home, school, and community.

Standard 7.0: Staffing and Professional Development

An exemplary alternative education program is staffed with effective, innovative, and qualified staff. Furthermore, the program has ongoing, relevant professional development to ensure both teacher and student success.

7.1	The program employs enthusiastic, energetic, and innovative teachers who demonstrate multiple teaching styles.
7.2	Teachers are highly qualified.
7.3	The staff understands and practices the concept of facilitative learning.
7.4	The diversity of the staff mirrors the diversity of the student body.
7.5	The school district provides a sufficient number of trained teaching assistants, guidance counselors, and other appropriate support individuals.
7.6	The experience of the faculty mirrors the experience of the school district.
7.7	Surveys of program content and staff development needs are distributed to establish both short and long-term professional development plans.
7.8	Staff members participate in professional development opportunities that facilitate personal and professional growth.
7.9	Sufficient resources, such as time and substitutes, allow staff to participate in workshops, conferences, and seminars.
7.10	Administration ensures that ongoing professional development helps build staff's capacity through the use of research based strategies and ensures that learned techniques are implemented.

Standard 8.0: Individualized Learner Plans

An exemplary alternative education program individualizes the student's curriculum and instruction using a learner plan to engage and challenge the student.

8.1	The program uses available resources to develop a learner plan based on the student's differentiated (remedial or accelerated) needs.
8.2	The Student Support Team is actively involved in forming and monitoring the student's progress on the learner plan and provides the support necessary for achievement.
8.3	The learner plan reviews current credit attainment and ensures that the student is making adequate progress toward graduation.
8.4	Teachers use individual student data in making instructional decisions and developing the learner plan.
8.5	Plans incorporate goals for changing negative behavior patterns which may have impeded the student's success (e.g. absences, suspension, tardiness, etc.).
8.6	The learner plan should address required services to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

8.7	Plans should integrate the student's 4-year graduation plan.

Standard 9.0: Life Skills
An exemplary alternative education program integrates life skills development into the curriculum and instruction.

9.1	The program utilizes available resources to address the specific life skill needs of participants (e.g. career exploration, citizenship, conflict resolution, decision making skills, job shadowing, problem solving skills, public speaking, social skills, teamwork, time management, work readiness, etc.).
9.2	Students have opportunities to put relevant life skills into action.
9.3	Instruction includes self assessment, paired with short and long term goal setting.
9.4	Curricula address constructive criticism and how to properly react.
9.5	Students have the opportunity to engage in service learning.

Standard 10.0: Curriculum and Instruction
An exemplary alternative education program utilizes Tennessee's state standards, incorporates innovative teaching strategies, delivers research-based instructional techniques, and provides the resources necessary to foster student learning and achievement.

10.1	All students have access to the academic core curriculum.
10.2	Teachers use Tennessee's standard core course of study to facilitate instruction.
10.3	Formal and informal assessments document students' progress toward completion of the individualized learner plan.
10.4	Differentiated instruction is provided to accommodate students' various learning styles and recognizes multiple intelligences.
10.5	Assessment results are utilized to determine programming changes and allows the student to monitor his/her own learning and progress.
10.6	Instructors collaborate with other teachers and the home school to enhance teaching strategies and close learning gaps.
10.7	Group delivery systems are used to support collaboration and teamwork.
10.8	Instruction meets the learning style needs of each student and includes opportunities for hands-on, project oriented (experiential) activities.
10.9	Instructional strategies are aligned with the goals and expectations of the students' individualized learner plan(s).
10.10	Teaching across all curricula is employed by instructors.
10.11	Distance learning is utilized when appropriate (e.g. e4TN, GED +2, etc.).
10.12	Technology is embedded in the curricula delivery process.
10.13	The curriculum is supported by access to a balance of up-to-date and well-maintained collection of textbooks, library media, technology, software and other instructional supplies and materials.
10.14	The program has ensured that the curriculum is implemented, supported and accessible for all students.

Standard 11.0: Student Assessment
An exemplary alternative education program routinely assesses students' progress and adjusts instruction accordingly.

11.1	The purpose of assessments are clearly defined and communicated to students, staff, and parents.
11.2	Teachers use formative and summative assessment tools that are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with curriculum and instruction to track student performance and progress.
11.3	Teachers use assessments to analyze student work and identify achievement gaps.
11.4	Assessment, curriculum, and instruction are directly linked to planning for and accommodating a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences.
11.5	Valid and reliable assessments are aligned with district-wide measures to identify student progress as prescribed by the State of Tennessee.
11.6	Results of assessments are used to inform the students and parent(s) of progress, guide the individualized learner plan, and modify the instructional delivery.

Standard 12.0: Monitoring and Program Assessment
An exemplary alternative education program systematically conducts program evaluations while using that data for continuous improvement.

12.1	The school district routinely conducts evaluations to determine progress toward the program's mission, standards, and plan for improvement.
12.2	Program evaluations include a review of student achievement data (e.g. TCAP test scores, course grades, drop-out data, etc.).
12.3	Program evaluations include a review of student behavioral progress (e.g. discipline data, recidivism rates, etc.).
12.4	Program evaluations are used to develop or update the plan for program improvement.
12.5	The school district makes use of strategic long-range planning to continuously improve alternative education services.
12.6	The school system uses an external evaluator to examine attainment of exemplary practices in alternative education.